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243 ance is unknown. War or banditry may ruin a merchant, but
311 a farmer will probably come through a period of disorder at
423 least with his land intact and sufficient part of the crop to live on. Although public order in western Yunnan is now well maintained, it was not always so; even within the memory of men still quite young the roads were unsafe and one could not venture a few miles from the city without running the risk of robbery.

The peculiarity of the Min Chia system is not therefore the high value placed on land itself, but the exclusive preference for rice lands. If the lack of public security in the past was the only reason for high land values it would apply as much to the mountains as to the plain, indeed perhaps more, for the inhabitants of a mountain district would be too remote to suffer much risk of robbery or pillage at the hands of soldiery. The mountain lands, however, are not regarded as worth anything at all, they are not even owned. The whole surface of the mountain and its lower slopes is public land, or in other words free to all comers, waste, neither subject to rent nor tax. Yet, though certainly useless for rice cultivation, these lands if terraced could grow other crops, and are in fact covered with wild fruit bushes and forest.

The Min Chia therefore revolve in an economic vicious circle of their own making : rice cultivation alone is regarded as worth while, but as the area of suitable land is restricted it has become very valuable, and being valuable is regarded as the most desirable investment, which reinforces the importance attached to rice cultivation. Meanwhile, overlooking the rice plain of Ta Li, is a vast tract of waste land, certainly capable of exploitation, but which, being
438 mountain, the Min Chia farmer entirely ignores. Since the
435 whole of Yunnan, in common with the rest of south China,
511 also produces rice, and for the most part in sufficient quan-

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tity to supply the local markets, rice can never be an export crop for the Min Chia farmer. A quantity is sent up to Li Chiang and Chien Ch'uan, which having a colder climate, are less productive; but the cost of transporting rice on mule back, the only means of transport, is so high that this trade can never develop on a large scale. Therefore, in a good year the price of rice at Ta Li falls very low and the farmer's purchasing power declines proportionately ; in a bad year the quantity of rice harvested is not sufficient to provide an export surplus, and the poorer farmers, after paying their rice rents, have difficulty in living off the remainder of the crop, and cannot afford to make other purchases. The rice standard is therefore a check on trade and a factor causing the standard of living to remain low.

The Min Chia, who are in most respects a practical and hard headed people, were not unaware of these disadvantages, and sought to escape from them by producing an export crop which would not interfere with the cultivation of rice, and would yet command a good price in distant markets. Such a crop must have a high value for small bulk, for as it must be transported for at least two weeks on mule back to reach any market of importance (either Yunnanfu or Burma) no bulky inexpensive commodity would show a profit after the costs of transport were deducted. Such a crop they found in opium, which was introduced into Yunnan in the first half of the nineteenth century. Opium admirably fulfilled the conditions outlined above. It was planted on the rice lands as a winter crop, harvested in May before the rice seedlings are transplanted. Therefore it did not interfere with rice cultivation. It was light and fetched a very high price in the markets of Yunnanfu whence it was transported to other parts of China. It thus provided the Min Chia with, from their point of view, the perfect export crop, which brought outside money into the closed economy of Ta Li and

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THE RICE STANDARD

Since the war with Japan began the National Currency has 436
fallen in relation to sterling, but the internal purchasing power of the local currency has hardly altered at all. Therefore it is better to express the value of the local currency in sterling in accordance with the rate of exchange prevailing before the war, in the first half of 1937.

In calculating the value of the yield of any farm in the Ta 434
Li region it must be remembered, that as rice cannot be exported in any quantity owing to the high cost and inadequate nature of the transport, when the crop is good the price is low, and when the price is high, it is because the yield is poor. The Min Chia farmer therefore never gets the maximum return from his land which is theoretically possible, and an estimate of the income derived from rice farming must take account of this. We may take the harvest of 1938 as an example. The year was good, the crop abundant ; consequently the price of rice was low, seven nickel cents to the *sheng*, or about 2½*d.* for nine lbs. The yield was high, twelve *tou* to the *mu*, therefore,

One *tou* of ten *sheng* gives 70 nickel cents = 7 $ Nickel
One *mu* yields 12 *tou* giving 84 $ Nickel
One acre or six *mu* gives 504 $ Nickel = £6 6*s.* 0*d.*

which is not a poor return on an investment of £45 0*s.* 0*d.* A further return of about one tenth the value of the rice crop is obtained from the wheat or other winter crops.

A family of moderate means, owning 18 *mu* or three acres, 434
would therefore have harvested in 1938 crops to the value of 511
about £20 0*s.* 0*d.* If the family consisted of some five or six 427
persons, adults and children, £10 0*s.* 0*d.* worth would be consumed by themselves as food, leaving at most half the crop to sell or exchange for other commodities. The purchasing power of such a family would in other words be at most £10 0*s.* 0*d.* per annum. If however they had to rent half

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their land, and thus obtain only half the crop from that portion, their surplus for sale or exchange would only be worth £5 os. od. There are many families, about one third of the farming population, in this situation. Perhaps another third have just enough land to live on without renting, and one third, rich peasants rather than landlords, possess a surplus of land which they lease to others.

With these small margins it is obvious that very little trade can be done with the outside world, or even with other parts of the province. Very different was the situation when opium was grown as the winter crop. Opium yielded sixty catties to the *mu* and sold for 6 $ Nickel the catty. In terms of sterling this is 1s. 6d. for one and a quarter pounds. Consequently the farmer realised £4 10s. od. per *mu* for his opium crop, or £27 on the acre. When it is realised that three acres of rice and wheat only yield crops to the value of £20, the consequences of the suppression of opium become plain. The family with three acres, eighteen *mu*, used to raise opium crops to the value of £87 os. od. in addition to their rice crop worth about £18 os. od. To-day all this has disappeared and they are left with the £20 os. od. return on their wheat and rice, of which half is consumed as food.

It is remarkable in these circumstances that the value of land has only fallen by one third, a proof of the high value the Min Chia attach to land as such irrespective of the return it gives. It is also curious that when opium was permitted and gave such high returns, no attempt was made to cultivate the poppy on the mountain slopes, where it would grow very well. Even with a cash crop worth four times the value of rice the Min Chia still had their eyes fixed on the rice lands and only grew opium when rice was out of season.

The farmer who cultivates more land than he and his family can work does not always rent it out to others. He may hire labour at a fixed wage of 8 nickel cents a day and also

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511 241 434 262 As long as the Min Chia farmer keeps out of debt his economic position is fairly satisfactory. Subsidiary crops, grown often on the edges of the rice fields, or on some bank of raised land which cannot be irrigated, provide both a variety of diet and a little cash. Tobacco, rather coarse in quality, is grown widely. Cabbages, carrots, onions, taro, a kind of turnip, artichokes, peas, haricot and long beans, and in recent years a few potatoes, add flavour to the rice bowl. Indigo for the common blue dye, pulse for lamp oil, and hemp for string, are always in demand. On dry ground some maize, sorghum and barley are grown. Many farmers have a few tea bushes in their kitchen gardens, and some mulberries, peas, peaches and apricots are produced for home consumption. The good quality fruit, however, citrus in winter, pears and peaches in summer, all comes from the other side of the lake.

241 For fertilisers the Min Chia depend on lake weed, pond weed, animal and human manure. No chemical fertilisers are in use and most Min Chia farmers do not seem to have ever heard of them. Oxen or water buffalo are used for ploughing, and occasionally donkeys are used for transporting the harvest to market, but most of the field work is done by the farmers themselves, their wives, and children. The plough ing of wet rice land is very heavy work, for which the water buffalo, an enormously powerful animal, is best suited. A buffalo can plough five *mu*—nearly an acre—in a day, which would require two oxen. The buffalo, however, is an expensive animal, worth about 50 or 60 Silver dollars a head (£2 5*s*. 0*d*.) and many farmers cannot afford them. The price of oxen is between 20 and 30 Silver dollars a head, but as two are needed to plough a rice field there is not much economy in using oxen.

462 241 Men and women do the same field work, except that the heavy work of ploughing is left to the men. Women weed

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CHAPTER 9

INVITATION TO THE FEAST

WHAT are called modern comforts are unknown as yet to the Min Chia, rich or poor. There is no water supply except wells, no lighting except oil lamps or candles, no sanitation at all. Glass windows are a rare luxury never installed throughout a house, and the panes are small and of inferior quality. Most windows are of paper pasted over wooden lattices, which are very artistic but quite opaque, admitting only a dim light. The only system of heating houses in the cold winter evenings or wet days is the use of charcoal burners, for no Min Chia house has fireplaces or chimneys. In a Min Chia house with paper windows one may have either light or heat, but not both at once. For if the windows are shut the light is dim, and if they are kept open the charcoal brazier is not sufficient to keep the room warm.

These discomforts are inevitable in a country so far removed from the centres where modern luxuries are produced, but the Min Chia do not make the most of the materials they have to hand, even when they are well able to afford them. A bamboo lattice screen hung over the doorway or window will keep out flies from a room in summer, and such screens are occasionally used. Most rooms, however, do not have them, and in the spring months before the rains, the ordinary Min Chia house is black with flies, about which everyone complains. Yet it never seems to occur to them to make use of lattice screens at every doorway. This attitude is indeed usual. Rich men live in discomfort, of which they are well aware, but seem to lack the knowledge of how to improve conditions.

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a seat on the bed, or rather invites his guest to recline on the bed, which is indeed the only approach to a comfortable seat which he can find.

The fact that beds are always found in the guest room, usually across the altar facing the door, is due to the crowded conditions of even wealthy Min Chia homes, and to the entire absence of the idea of privacy. A Min Chia home, if it is built on four sides of the courtyard, may have twelve rooms on the ground floor, and the same number on the upper floor, but the family, however few, would not dream of each occupying one room. Husband and wife will share one small room, perhaps the grandmother may have one to herself, the rest of the family are crowded together two or more to a room, and the empty part of the house is let to strangers, or, if the family is really large, distributed among other relations. Usually the upper storey, which to western ideas, is the most desirable part of the house, as it alone has windows on both sides, is left empty or used for storing produce or lumber. The Mia Chia do not like to sleep upstairs, and rarely use that part of the house at all.

In spite of the fact that so much space is there to hand, a Min Chia house has usually only one sitting room in use, and that is at once the dining room, guest hall, and probably the bedroom of some member of the family as well. In such conditions privacy is impossible, and fortunately is not appreciated. Min Chia cannot understand why one person should want a room to himself, still less why anyone should want two. They themselves seem quite indifferent to noise and undisturbed by any distraction. Children will learn their lessons reading out loud at the tops of their voices, babies wail, dogs bark incessantly, someone hammers nails into a box, and through all this the master of the house will sit unmoved, indeed unaware, conversing with a friend, reading, or doing accounts.